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ABSTRACT

The educational value of games includes learning to: (1) follow directions and use social skills; (2) review information and use cognitive skills; (3) make decisions and live with the consequences; and (4) become aware of new information. This paper describes how teachers might use small group games to reinforce what is taught in social studies courses. Guidelines for designing small group games are provided, and methods of using card games, Twister, Bingo, Dominoes, board games, and Battle Ship are provided. Emphasis is placed on using games to increase map skills. (JHP)

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USING SMALL GROUP GAMES IN SOCIAL STUDIES

by

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Presentation at the 1988 NCSS Annual Meeting in Orlando, FL.

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USING SMALL GROUP GAMES IN SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION

Many children play and enjoy small group games before they entered school. Commercially prepared card games and board games are available for children ages three to adult. The educational values of games include:

1. Following directions and practice in using social skills.
2. Reviewing information and using cognitive skills.
3. Making decisions and living with the consequences.
4. Becoming aware of or learning new information.

By examining commercial games, teachers can find help in making small group games of their own with content that reinforces what they teach in class. Small group games have an advantage over whole class games by offering greater participation because the role of observer is greatly reduced.

Few commercially prepared games are devoted to the knowledge associated with the social studies. Several games use money and investments and some careers. Games for older students and adults that ask questions often have categories of knowledge from history and the social sciences. Map skills is an area that can tap the characteristics of small group games with great success. The graphic nature of maps and reduced use of letters provides the opportunity to create games for everyone from the beginning to the accomplished reader.

A teacher can make social studies small group games by adding some familiar locations or creating an imaginary place. Adding

the element of chance turns a boring drill into an exciting experience where anyone can emerge as the winner! Imagination and determination are more important ingredients for making games that artistic ability. By using bright colored markers, prepared letters and stickers almost everyone can make an attractive game.

Follow these guidelines and make small group games for Social Studies:

1. Select one or more concepts to emphasize (symbols, legends, grid, directions, locations, land forms, bodies of water, famous people or landmarks.)
2. Decide what the child must do with the concept (name it, define it, collect it, move to it, or match it.)
3. Determine how to win the game.
4. Designate the order of play.
5. Write the rules for the game as numbered commands. Modeling the rules after familiar commercial games helps all students but especially the very young to play.
6. Borrow or create place markers and a way to advance for a board game.

Card games are a perfect for matching tasks. Match symbols, or words with symbols, the drawing of a state or nation with its name, capital, or continent. Use 3 by 5 index cards. Write or draw on one side and cover it with clear contact. Cover the opposite side of the card with a design of contact paper. Borrow the rules from a popular card game such as Rummy or Concentration where the winner has the most pairs. If you opt for rules similar to Old Maid, make a related odd card.

TWISTER is good as a matching exercise and for the recognition of the shapes. In this game the student places each hand and foot on different locations such as states, continents, or nations. The last student with body parts correctly placed and still standing is the winner. Playing this game is somewhat more noisy that others games but works well even with very young students.

BINGO can be played with paired associations or as answers to questions. The student might be required to correctly locate places on a map as the locations are called aloud. Maps can be used as the cards if the required matches are underlined. Since it is only necessary for one different location to be underlined to create a unique game map, students can practice map locations rather than only associate words.

Dominoes can be made that link concepts and definitions or words and graphic symbols.

Board games provide a great variety of opportunities because of the many ways to win. The winner might be the first person to a particular point, to complete one's own pathway, or the one with the most points or collected symbols in a legend. Students can also begin the game by drawing a card which tells them what they must do to win so that everyone has a different yet equal number of tasks to accomplish in order to win. The appearance of game boards can vary greatly from realistic drawings or pictures connecting pathways for a visit to the zoo or trip around mystery

island to commercial city, state, national, or world maps. File folders, poster board, and old commercial game boards, the mounted canvas boards used by artists serve well as the base for a board. Commercially prepared labels and circles can be used to form pathways and to color code answers and questions.

A game for two players that uses the grid system can be modeled after the commercial game Battle Ship. The grid has letters over the horizontal spaces and numbers along the vertical spaces. Instead of weapons other symbols can be used such as vegetables for a salad or supplies for an artist. Taking turns the players call out coordinates of one letter and one number. If the other player has placed an item in the square called, the item is taken from the grid and given to the player who called the coordinates. The winner who is the first to collect all of the opponents items wins the game. This game board requires a visual block between the players. Such a game board can be made by joining together one side of each of two file folders. A yarn or string that is tied through a hole in the single side and the glued side of the folder will help to hold the visual barrier in place.

If questions are a part of the game, they may be things that students have learned in class or the answers may be read from the map with the help of its legend. If you wonder how you'll ever find the time to make small group games, consider starting a game and letting your children help you complete it with their questions, coloring, and drawings. Teacher-made educational games

are fun for the children and a stimulating way to provide additional drill and practice with definitions, locations, skills, facts and to build an awareness while promoting the values of cooperation and group work.